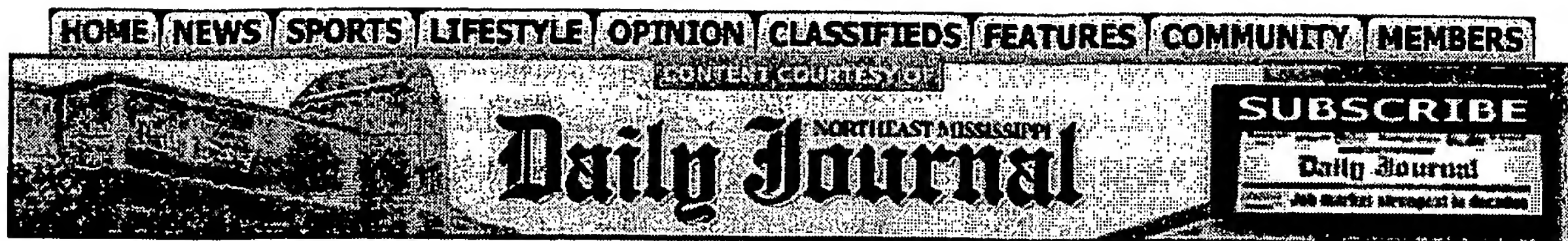




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A better mousetrap

7/13/2003 8:14:28 AM

Daily Journal

BY GARY PERILLOUX

Daily Journal

OXFORD - What distinguishes HomeSafe's method of home inspection from other approaches?

"We have a better mousetrap," says inventor Peng Lee.

And mice are one thing Lee knows how to find.

On a recent morning-long inspection, Lee pointed his infrared camera upward and there, in the attic's pink insulation, nestled the furry forms of rodents. Baiting, traps and barring access points are potential mousetrap solutions to a common problem.

Lee points out "\$10 problems" but says he's most interested in detecting the potential \$5,000 problems that can save parties to a home transaction lots of time, grief and money down the road.

Lee's "Ghostbusters"-like battery of cameras, sensors, ultrasound microphones, Pocket PCs and

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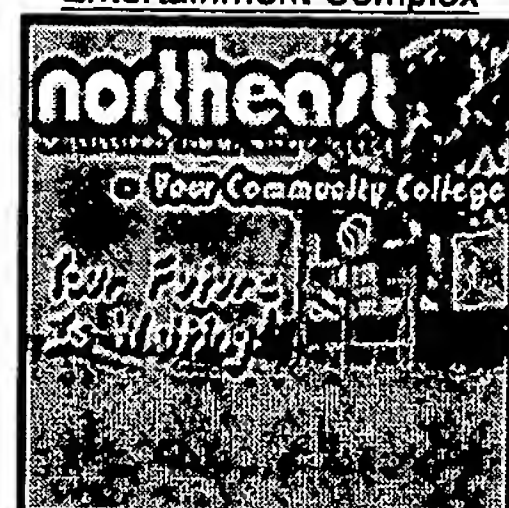
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"The software will make the call," Lee says. "So I take the human error out of it."

But human intelligence in the form of state-licensed inspectors who go through additional HomeSafe training is essential to the process. Visual inspections, flashlights, deductive reasoning and homeowner counseling are part of the inspection process.

"I'm a scientist," Lee says. "I want to find the reason behind (the problem). We use the technology back and forth in a home inspection."

Inside walls, Lee's infrared camera can pinpoint sources of heat-loss and acoustic sensors can hear termites crunching. On the recent inspection, Lee eliminated one heat-loss situation by noting cold air coming from a floor register.

Water stains near a window turned out to be superficial, with no sound of termites in the wall. He did pick up "hot spots" at wall receptacles where wiring standards weren't up to the load they were carrying and recommended electrical work to prevent a fire.

In a second-floor attic with finished floors and walls, Lee recommended carbon-monoxide detectors because a gas hot-water heater inhabited the living space there.

Because HomeSafe has previously untapped talent for pointing out flaws, some people in the home-selling process might flinch at so detailed an inspection. But the company's CEO said HomeSafe often turns the table in the opposite direction.

"We've saved so many deals," Kevin Seddon said. "The more you know, the better off everybody is."

One grand old Oxford home sat on the market for years, rejected multiple times by buyers after visual inspections led to conjecture about a bad roof.



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"We went to the house, shot the infrared up through the ceiling and there was no water, no moisture (at the roof level)," Seddon said.

At a lower level, though, moisture from an overhead uninsulated air duct had dripped through and stained the ceiling. After \$300 of insulation, the house was cleared for a sale.

"That house didn't sell for three years because people thought the roof was bad," Seddon said.

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